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ABSTRACT

This study investigated students' attitudes toward multi-age classrooms, specifically examining differences in attitudes based on gender and grade level. The Multiage Attitude Survey was administered at the end of the school year to students in two multi-age classrooms: one classroom with 11 third-grade and 10 fourth-grade students, the other with 11 fifth-grade and 13 sixth-grade students. Results revealed no significant difference in attitudes based on gender. However, differences were found in grade level attitudes. Correlations between grade level and negative attitudes toward multi-age classrooms indicated that the higher grade-level students (fourth graders and sixth graders) had more negative attitudes toward the multiple groupings than did younger students in each classroom. (Author/MM)

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Attitudes Toward Multiple Aged Classrooms of Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Grade Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes toward multiage classrooms of third-fourth and fifth-sixth grade students, specifically, to see any differences between gender and/or grade-level. An Attitude Survey (Smith,1993) was administered at the end of the school year to two multiage classrooms, one comprised of third and fourth grade students and the other of fifth and sixth grade students. Results indicated there was no significant difference in attitudes based on gender, however, there was a difference in grade level attitudes. Correlations between grade level and negative attitudes toward multiage classrooms indicated the higher grade level students (sixth grade and fourth grade) had more negative attitudes toward the multiple groupings than the younger (third and fifth) in each of the classrooms. The findings suggest the lower grade level students of the multiage classes expressed more positive attitudes than the higher grade students without differences in gender.

Attitudes Toward Multiple Aged Classrooms of Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Grade Students

There is a growing concern in the United Stated that students cannot compete educationally, on a global scale. In the mad rush to find the magical key to education, several methods have been or are being implemented. One educational strategy researched by Goodlad and Anderson (1959), that ran its course in the late 1960's and early 1970's, nongraded or multiage schools, has emerged again in the late 1980's to present. Gaustad(1992), defines nongraded education (multiage education) as the practice of teaching children of different ages and ability levels together, without dividing them into groups labeled by grade designations.

Failure of this method in the 1960's, according to Cohen (1990), was due to teaching methods not being conducive to multiple age group teaching. However, today such educational strategies as whole language, cooperative learning, manipulative math, and technology-based writing are activity oriented approaches that easily adapt to multiage classrooms.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students toward multiage classrooms. Attitudes were defined as negative toward multiage classrooms when low scores resulted on an attitude survey (Smith, 1993) and positive toward multiage classrooms when high scores resulted on the same survey. Specifically, the study was to investigate differences in attitudes based on gender and grade level. Grade level referred to two classrooms, one which was composed of third and fourth grade students, and the other of fifth and sixth grade students.

Background

It is widely accepted that the development of the whole child is essential for all students. Anderson(1959), suggests a main advantage for multiage classrooms is that it is more consistent with the fact that there are individual differences in human beings. Willis (1991), states that nongraded classrooms offer a better social atmosphere with healthier student relationships.

With respect to preferences of students toward same age or multiage friendships, Hartup (1976), has suggested that same age peer groups may be more reinforcing than multiage groups, and that when large numbers of same age individuals are available (traditional homogeneous classes), children will choose friends who resemble them in age and ability.

Thirty experimental studies conducted between 1948 and 1983 in the United States and Canada looked at attitudes toward multiage classrooms. In spite of some control differences between teachers and schools, the findings stated multiage grouping does tend to be associated with better self-concept and attitude toward school (Pratt, 1986).

Pratt (1986), indicates increased competition and aggression is the result within same age groups and increased harmony and nurturance within multiage groups. Pratt (1986), also suggests that multiage grouping appears particularly beneficial to the younger members of the group.

Major Questions/Hypothesis

The literature suggests that multiage groupings benefit students in classroom and social settings, and are particularly beneficial to younger members of the group. Therefore, it was hypothesized that third and fifth grade students from the multiage

classrooms would have more positive attitudes than their older counterparts (fourth and sixth grade students) toward multiage classrooms. Were there differences in attitudes based on gender within this group of students? Were there differences in attitudes based on grade levels of this particular group?

Method

Subjects

The sample from this study was selected from the total population of 45 students involved in a pilot program of multiage classrooms in Perrysburg, Ohio. There were eleven third grade students, ten fourth grade students, eleven fifth grade students, and 13 sixth grade students (2 were unable to participate due to absence). The population was predominately upper middle class, 99% Caucasion and 1% Indian. This sample does not include Hispanic or Black Americans that have a very small representation in the Perrysburg Exempted Village school system. Students were already in classes whose sizes were 21 (third and fourth) and 22 (fifth and sixth).

Measures

The Multiage Attitude Survey (MAS), (Smith 1993), was used as the measuring instrument for this study. The MAS was designed for students in multiage classes at the elementary level (third - sixth grades) to measure attitudes, and identify individual concerns related to multiage versus same age classes. It consists of 18 self-report items representing six variables relating to multiage and same age classrooms. The variables are: 1) preferences at lunch time 2) preference in make up of classroom (multiage or homogeneous) 3) preference of playmates at recess 4) academic performance 5) preference of who to invite to a party

6) performance on class work. It also asked for a written response paragraph relating to the individual's choice between a multiage or same age classroom, in order to identify specific concerns or differences. The internal consistency reliability estimate (Cronbach's alpha) of the MAS (N=43) was .90 for the eighteen item survey.

Procedures

The attitude survey was administered in May 1993 to the two multiage classrooms. Each statement was read aloud and students were given time to respond. After the eighteen statements were read, the students were given ten minutes to write a paragraph in response to preference of multiage or same age classrooms. Students were informed that responses did not reflect their grades and that all information was strictly confidential.

Results

Did student attitudes toward multiage classrooms differ based on gender? Did student attitudes toward multiage classrooms differ between grade levels?

Gender and Attitudes

The 23 females' scores produced a mean attitude score of 2.76 (SD=.635). The 20 males produced a mean attitude score of 2.73 (SD=.743). There was no difference between the means (t (41) = .13), therefore, attitudes toward multiage classrooms did not differ based on gender.

Grade level and Attitudes

The 11 third grade students produced mean attitude scores toward liking multiage classrooms of 3.06 (SD=.438). The 10 fourth grade students produced a mean attitude score of 2.87 (SD=.849). The 11 fifth grade students produced a mean

attitude score of 2.89 (SD=.239). The 11 sixth grade students produced a mean attitude score of 2.17 (SD=.724). There was a difference in attitudes toward multiage classrooms across grade levels (F (3, 40)=4.7, p=.007). This difference was linear in nature (F=10.6, p=.003).

Discussion

The results of this study support the original hypothesis: Third and fifth grade students from multiage classrooms would have more positive attitudes than their older counterparts (fourth and sixth grade students) toward multiage classrooms. Further, the attitudes of these subjects were negatively correlated. As students grow older, they have more negative attitudes toward multiage classrooms. Subjects' written responses also reflected the same attitude. There was no difference in attitudes based on gender.

Since this study took place in an upper middle class, predominately caucasion, environment, results cannot be generalized to all classrooms. Also, this study was based on attitudes of students who were placed in a pilot program spanning only one year. Continued commitment to the program could yield different results. Further focused research is needed.

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Appendix

MULTIAGE ATTITUDE SURVEY

Please circle the appropriate response.

I am male / female.

I am considered to be in the 3 / 4 / 5 / 6 grade.

Respond to the following statements with *SA* (strongly agree), *A* (agree), *D* (disagree), *SD* (strongly disagree).

1. I prefer to eat lunch with students in my own grade level. _____
2. I enjoy being in class only with students of my grade level. _____
3. I prefer to work on class assignments alone. _____
4. I dislike doing class assignments with students of my own grade level. _____
5. If I had a party, I would only invite kids that are in my grade level. _____
6. At recess, I choose to interact with students who are in my grade level. _____
7. I do better academically when I work with students of different grade levels. _____
8. I get better grades when I work with students of my own grade level. _____
9. I learn more when I am surrounded by students of several grade levels. _____
10. I have the most fun when I am with students of several grade levels. _____
11. I get less done when I work with students of my own grade level. _____

12. When preparing for a test, I would rather study with a student of my own grade level than of another. _____

13. I do not do as well academically, when I work with students in my own grade level. _____

14. If I had a party I would invite kids of several grade levels. _____

15. I dislike doing class assignments with students of different grade levels. _____

16. I prefer to work on class assignments with groups. _____

17. I enjoy being in class with students of different ages. _____

18. I prefer to eat lunch with students of different ages. _____

Please write a paragraph responding to the following question.

If you were given the choice of being in a multi-aged classroom again, or a standard, same-aged classroom next year, which would you choose and why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____